



Management of the water towers, like this one in the Mau Forest, requires establishing a balance between agricultural expansion and forest conservation. Photo USAID

KENYA

Kenya Integrated Management of Water Towers

Most of Kenya's forests are in mountain areas, in particular the Mau Forest Complex, Mt. Kenya, Aberdares, Cherangany Hills, and Mt. Elgon. These areas are known as the "water towers" of Kenya as they form the upper catchment of all, but one of the main rivers in Kenya. The water towers provide an estimated 75% of the country's water resources and are vital to Kenya's economic and social well-being. Despite their critical importance, the water tower ecosystems have been seriously degraded and continue to be impacted by irregular and ill-planned settlements, overgrazing, uncontrolled and illegal forest resource extraction, and the conversion of forest land to agriculture. The continued degradation of these forests contributes to a growing water crisis in Kenya and the larger region. Moreover, the loss of biodiversity and increased carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation are exacerbated by climate change.

OUR WORK

The goal of the Kenya Integrated Management of Water Towers (KTWP) project is to support information-driven strategic planning to strengthen interventions designed to enhance the resilience of Kenya's water tower ecosystems. The program advances forest conservation and community development by enabling community members to take the lead in conservation. Ongoing actions under this activity are guided by the six overarching interventions identified in the Water Towers' Strategic Framework, which was built through a series of stakeholder consultations, including local communities and county governments. Enhanced participation of these stakeholders in management decision-making and benefit-sharing is critical to the long-term sustainability of the water towers.

PROGRAM AREAS

Inclusive participation in landscape conservation and management

Enhancing the capacity of communities to manage ecosystems with improved stewardship and self-reliance is a key goal of the project. The Kenya Forest Conservation and Management Act (2016) mandates that all forests be managed in accordance with an approved Participatory Forest Management Plan (PFMP) and that Community Forest Associations play a key role in the development and implementation of PFMPs. The Kenya Water Act of 2016 provides a legal framework for the establishment of Water Resource Users Associations at the local level for increased participation in water resource management. The project supports target communities to develop and implement integrated ecosystem management plans, including capacity building actions for improved governance, financial management, conflict resolution and improved functioning of CFAs.

National Water Tower Management Strategy

In partnership with the Kenya Water Towers Agency, USAID is supporting the development of a National Water Towers Strategy. The strategy will be developed through extensive regional consultative forums with government and civil society, focusing on problem analysis and participatory development of strategic actions. A key component of this strategy is the involvement of local communities in designing and implementing management, rehabilitation, and conservation activities.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Participation of eleven senior government officials from the GoK institutions in United States Forest Service seminars on watershed and protected area management and forest landscape restoration.
- Development of comprehensive climate change vulnerability assessment, highlighting the ecological and socio-economic vulnerabilities of the three water tower ecosystems, and a suite of measures to enhance resilience and adaptive capacity of the landscapes and local communities.
- Assessing the value of the three water tower ecosystems and launch of the valuation report by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MEF).
- Engagement of a broad suite of stakeholders from national, county, and community levels to identify strategic priorities. This engagement aligns with the Kenya Constitution (2010) and the National Forest Policy (2016) and strengthens the community forest associations, enabling them to take on more responsibilities and be more effective in resource mobilisation to support local actions.

BUDGET: USD \$2.2 million

DURATION: 2015 – 2022

ACTIVITY LOCATIONS: Cherangany Hills, Mau Forest, and Mt Elgon

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER
U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

KEY PARTNERS

Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MEF), Kenya Forest Service (KFS), Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), Kenya Water Towers Agency (KWTA), Water Resources Authority (WRA)

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